



Information, Advice, and Support Service (IASS): Choosing a School - Things to Consider When Visiting a Secondary School for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Look for a School With a Welcoming and Inclusive Attitude:

Many factors could affect your child - for example, the width of the corridors or the existence of quiet spaces (which pupils can withdraw to if necessary). School buildings cannot be changed to suit your child, so look for an open, welcoming school that is willing to look for solutions to individual problems.

Questions You May Wish To Ask (and the Answers You Should Hope For):

- **Have They had Whole-School Training in ASDs Within the Last Few Years?**
You would hope the school had provided ASD training for staff and disseminated some practical strategies.
- **How Does the SENCo Ensure Teaching Staff Know Your Child's Particular Needs / Autistic Differences?**
SENcos give information in different ways. Brief bullet points (that show possible problems and the best ways to teach or manage the child) are best, as no one will remember reams of information. Some schools even develop small "passport" cards with/for some pupils.
- **Does the School Have a "Sanctuary" (Where Pupils Can Go at Break or Lunchtime if They Need To Find Somewhere Quieter)? Is Any Adult Supervision of This Place Set Up? Are There Any Activities Available in This Place, and if So, What Are They?**
You will know whether your child will benefit from a quieter place. You will know if they need somewhere specific to go, something concrete to do when they get there, and someone to facilitate social contact. Schools vary in what they provide.
- **How Will the School Aim To Keep in Touch Regarding Progress, Given the Child's Additional Needs?**
Not many secondary schools keep home-school books, but some schools provide weekly updates via email or phone. Other schools will let you know if there is a problem and send home an Individual Education Plan (IEP) when they are reviewed. You should be invited to the school for annual reviews.

- **Will You Be Given the Name of a Key Worker Who You Can Contact When Necessary?**

It's helpful to have one named person that you can liaise with. It will make it easier to give or receive information or ask for help if there's a difficulty.

- **Does the School Have Any Ways of Helping Pupils Who Find Their Homework Difficult?**

The school might run a homework club. They might offer study sessions to help some pupils. They might email some of the homework to you.

- **How Does the School Ensure Children Develop Their Friendships and Social Skills in Addition to Their Academic Skills?**

You should hope for good personal, social, health, and economic (PSHE) education, especially in the first few weeks of term. Some schools use the secondary Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme. Some schools have buddy systems. Some have social skills programmes. Many have special-interest clubs that could engage your child with like-minded peers.

- **Do You Plan Any Extra Induction to the School for Children Who Need a More Thorough Transition Programme?**

Some secondary schools allow this if primary schools take the initiative. Some run an extra day (or extra week) for pupils with an EHC Plan. Some SENCos visit the primary school to attend a review or meet the child. Sometimes a teaching assistant from the secondary school will visit the child in their primary school and liaise with primary staff. They will see what arrangements are set up and talk through any helpful systems the primary school uses.

- **A Word of Warning**

Think twice before you involve your child in visiting lots of schools and making decisions. Children on the spectrum tend to find change and uncertainty difficult. It might be best not to involve your child (too much) in discussing and evaluating the different possibilities. Be careful not to communicate any worries you may have over that transfer to secondary.

- **Be Positive**

Try to have a positive and problem-solving approach to the change-of-school ahead! It may surprise you by being better than you feared. No good purpose can be served by building up worries. You are bound to feel nervous, but try to mask these feelings with optimism when discussing the change with your child.

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